

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-12 EB-08 TRSE-00
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R 091404Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7728
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VALLETTA 1311

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MT, CH, UR
SUBJECT: LOCAL REACTION TO MINTOFF VISIT TO PRC

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S TRIP TO PRC HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF HEAVY LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE AS WELL AS CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION ABOUT HIS MOTIVES FOR ATTACKING THE USSR IN HIS NOVEMBER 3 SPEECH IN PEKING. THE PRO-LABOR PRESS HAS POINTED OUT MINTOFF'S PREVIOUS CRITICISM OF THE USSR FOR ITS LACK OF SUPPORT FOR MALTA WHILE THE NATIONALIST PRESS WONDERS IF IT IS WISE FOR MALTA TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE DISPUTES BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNIST "GIANTS". MINTOFF'S PRAISE OF CHINA AND HIS CRITICISM OF THE USSR ARE CONSISTENT WITH HIS PAST RHETORIC ON HIS POLICY OF NEUTRALITY AND
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NON-ALIGNMENT. HE UNDOUBTEDLY APPRECIATES CHINESE SUPPORT AND WANTS TO GET MORE. NOTE: THIS TELEGRAM ASSUMES DEPARTMENT HAS RECEIVED REPORTS OF MINTOFF'S PRC VISIT FROM USLO PEKING AND FBIS. END SUMMARY.

2. NOT SURPRISINGLY, PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S TRIP TO THE PRC HAS GENERATED HEAVY PRESS COVERAGE HERE AND

CONSIDERABLE LOCAL SPECULATION ABOUT HIS OBJECTIVES. THE PRESS, ASIDE FROM ITS STRAIGHT FORWARD NEWS COVERAGE, HAS DIVIDED INTO PREDICTABLE POSITIONS ON THE VALUE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT FOR MALTESE NATIONAL INTERESTS. THE MALTA NEWS, A MALTA LABOR PARTY (MLP) MOUTHPIECE, PRAISED MINTOFF'S SPEECH WHICH IT CHARACTERIZED AS SHOWING HIS "BRILLIANT DIPLOMACY IN ATTRACTING WORLD ATTENTION TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF MALTA'S FOREIGN POLICY." THE UNSIGNED ARTICLE ALSO PRAISED MINTOFF'S CRITICISM OF THE USSR FOR DENYING ASSISTANCE TO MALTA AFTER THE LATTER'S "SINGLEHANDED EFFORTS TO DRIVE NATO FROM ITS SOIL" (WHICH TRIGGERED A RUSSIAN AND EAST BLOC WALKOUT FROM THE CHINESE BANQUET WELCOMING MINTOFF). ACCORDING TO THIS ARTICLE, THE MALTESE LABOR PARTY'S ELECTORAL MANIFESTO IN 1971 AND 1976 MADE CLEAR THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO CONVERT MALTA INTO A NEUTRAL, NON-ALIGNED STATE. THE SOVIET UNION FROM THE VERY START SHOWED THAT IT PLANNED TO DISRUPT THE MALTESE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY WHEN IT OBJECTED TO A MALTESE PROPOSAL AT THE CSCE IN HELSINKI THAT ARAB COUNTRIES HAVE A SAY AT THE CSCE. THE ARTICLE ALSO QUOTED MINTOFF'S SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS IN APRIL, 1976 IN WHICH MINTOFF IS REPORTED AS SAYING "IN SPITE OF ALL THE HOLLOW NOISES OF APPROVAL WITH WHICH OUR ACTIONS WERE WELCOMED BY THE WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES NO SUBSTANTIAL HELP WAS FORTHCOMING FROM THIS QUARTER." THE ARTICLE POINTS OUT THAT DURING A PRE-ELECTION MEETING IN

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1976 MINTOFF EXPLAINED THAT IF A SOVIET EMBASSY IS TO BE OPENED IN MALTA, TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES NEED TO BE ESTABLISHED FIRST. THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE, IT IS MADE CLEAR THAT MALTA IS LOOKING NOT ONLY FOR "WORDS OF APPROVAL" BUT ALSO ECONOMIC AID AND COOPERATION SO THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO MEET ITS 1979 TARGETS FOR THE ECONOMY, THEREBY PROVIDING THE BASIS TO SUSTAIN MALTA'S POLICY OF NEUTRALITY AND NON-ALIGNMENT.

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AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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3. THE TIMES OF MALTA, ON THE OTHER HAND, IN A NOVEMBER 5 EDITORIAL QUESTIONS WHETHER MINTOFF'S POLICY TOWARD CHINA IS A GOOD ONE FOR MALTA. IN THE TIMES' VIEW, BECOMING TOO DEPENDENT ON COMMUNIST ASSISTANCE AND GETTING INVOLVED IN A POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNIST COUNTRIES IS NOT IN MALTA'S LONG-TERM NATIONAL INTEREST; RATHER MALTA MUST MAINTAIN ITS TRUE IDENTITY OF A CHRISTIAN ISLAND WHOSE FUTURE LIES WITH LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES I.E. WESTERN EUROPE. IN AN ANONYMOUSLY WRITTEN COLUMN IN THE SUNDAY TIMES, THE AUTHOR TAKES AN EVEN HARDER LINE AGAINST MINTOFF'S CHINA AND NEUTRALITY POLICIES. AFTER QUOTING MINTOFF'S COMMENT THAT THE "USSR HAD MUCH TO GAIN MILITARILY BY MALTA'S SINGLEHANDED EFFORTS TO DRIVE OUT NATO," THE ARTICLE ASKS IF MINTOFF WOULD PREFER RUSSIAN TO CHINESE AID. IT ALSO CHALLENGES MINTOFF'S ASSERTION THAT MALTA WAS DENIED CONFIDENTIAL

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INFORMATION "FROM THE SOVIET UNION" AND CITES THE MALTESE-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY WHICH, IT CLAIMS, HAS MANY LABOR PARTY EXECUTIVES AS A CHANNEL OF SUCH INFORMATION. THE ARTICLE NEXT ATTACKS CHINESE ASSISTANCE FOR BEING A LOAN WHICH HAS TO BE REPAID AND AS SUPPORTING PROJECTS WHICH ARE INADEQUATE TO REDUCE MALTA'S UNEMPLOYMENT. THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES BY SPECULATING ABOUT QADHAFI'S REACTION ON MINTOFF'S ATTACK ON THE SOVIET UNION AND WONDERS IF MALTA MAY ONE DAY NEED A MEDIATOR BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND LIBYA ON THE ONE SIDE AND CHINA ON THE OTHER.

4. COMMENT: LOCAL DIPLOMATIC SPECULATION ON MOTIVATION BEHIND MINTOFF'S CRITICAL REMARKS OF THE SOVIET UNION

INCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT MINTOFF'S OCTOBER 27 TRIP TO LIBYA DID NOT GO WELL, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE QADHAFI ATTEMPTED TO PROMOTE A LARGER ROLE FOR THE SOVIET UNION IN MALTA (AND LESS RELIANCE ON PEKING) WHICH MINTOFF REJECTED AND, TO DEMONSTRATE HIS DISPLEASURE, USED HIS SPEECH IN PEKING TO CRITICIZE THE USSR. SOME WONDER IF MINTOFF'S SPEECH REVEALS THAT EXPECTED SOVIET SUPPORT DURING THE 1971-72 CONFRONTATION WITH THE UK WHICH, WHEN IT WAS NOT FORTHCOMING, CAUSED HIM TO DECIDE TO CONCLUDE ANOTHER AGREEMENT WITH THE UK AND NATO. NEITHER OF THESE VIEWS APPEARS NECESSARILY PLAUSIBLE TO US; RATHER WE SEE MINTOFF'S BEHAVIOR AS BEING MORE OR LESS IN KEEPING WITH THE EXPLANATION PROVIDED BY THE MALTA NEWS (PARA 2). WE SEE LITTLE REASON TO DOUBT THAT MINTOFF REMAINS CONSISTENT IN HIS FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES OF NEUTRALITY AND NON-ALIGNMENT AND THAT HE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE ASSISTANCE HE RECEIVES FROM THE CHINESE. WHILE THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF SOME OF THE CHINESE PROJECTS ARE CERTAINLY QUESTIONABLE, MINTOFF MUST NEVERTHELESS APPRECIATE THE EASY TERMS OF THE CHINESE AID AS WELL AS THE HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION HE

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RECEIVES FROM THE PRC. DURING A COURTESY CALL ON THE CHINESE CHARGE BY THE DCM ON NOVEMBER 7, THE CHARGE REITERATED THAT CHINA'S POLICY OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO MALTA IS SIMPLY TO HELP MALTA ACHIEVE ITS POLICY OF NEUTRALITY AND NON-ALIGNMENT. THE CHARGE WAS ESPECIALLY POINTED IN HIS COMMENTS ABOUT CHINA'S WILLINGNESS TO HELP MALTA RESIST ANY ECONOMIC TEMPTATION FROM THE SOVIET UNION. IN THIS CONNECTION HE NOTED THAT CHINA WILL NEVER FORCE MALTA TO REPAY THE INTEREST-FREE CHINESE LOANS IF MALTA IS NOT IN A POSITION ECONOMICALLY TO DO SO. HE ALSO ANTICIPATES THAT THE PROTOCOL ON ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION SIGNED ON NOVEMBER 6 WILL INCLUDE ASSISTANCE FOR PART OF THE MARSAXLOKK HARBOR PROJECT AND ADDITIONAL INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS.

4. WE WOULD WELCOME USLO PEKING'S COMMENTS ON MINTOFF'S VISIT. LAINGEN

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